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SUBJECT: ISRAELI FM SHALOM OFFERS CAUTIOUS VIEW ON
PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS TO CODEL LIEBERMAN/DAYTON

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer; Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: While acknowledging that the situation had improved since Arafat's death, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told Senators Lieberman and Dayton on December 28 that he is "discouraged" by Abu Mazen's recent remarks on the campaign trail. Shalom interpreted the speech as an indication that Abu Mazen will not dismantle the terrorist infrastructure or compromise on Palestinian demands for a right of return to Israel. Shalom said the Israeli Government is facilitating the Palestinian elections, but he expressed concern that the Palestinians will continue Arafat's policies and offer "the same old excuses." In response to a question from the CoDel, Shalom outlined his proposal for another Aqaba conference, which he said would build confidence but avoid substantive issues. Shalom told the CoDel that the way to deal with both the Palestinians and the Arab world is to embrace moderates and isolate extremists. He said that the EU-3's position on Iran is "much better than before," but still in need of improvement. END SUMMARY.

Shalom Discouraged by Abu Mazen's Statements

12. (C) In a December 28 meeting with Senator Joseph Lieberman, Senator Mark Dayton, the Ambassador, Senate staff, and military escort, Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said he is "very discouraged" by Abu Mazen's December 25 election speech in which the Palestinian leader had been "tougher than Arafat." Shalom interpreted the remarks as an indication that Abu Mazen will not dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and will continue to insist on the right of return. Shalom questioned why the Palestinians would want to return to a Jewish state and, as he described it, trade their current Diaspora for another. He expressed hope that Abu Mazen's actions would be guided by the comments he had made as Prime Minister and not the ones he is making on the campaign trail. The Foreign Minister cautioned that he wants "everyone in the international community to ... be aware of what Mahmoud Abbas is saying."

Palestinian Elections and the Aftermath

13. (C) Shalom said the Israeli government is "doing everything we can" to facilitate the Palestinian elections, including the provision of assistance to election observers. He added that he is more concerned, however, by "what will happen the day after" and by Palestinian actions following the first post-election terrorist attack. He reiterated his call for the Palestinians to stop incitement against Israel, saying it is something Abu Mazen "could do in a day." He acknowledged that it would take longer to fight terrorism, but insisted that a cease-fire is insufficient. Shalom said that the Palestinians should begin a crackdown against terrorism the day after the elections.

14. (C) Describing the CoDel's meetings with Abu Mazen, Abu Ala'a, and Salam Fayyad on December 27 (septel), Senator Lieberman said he was struck by the difference between the election rhetoric on campaign posters and the Palestinians' private comments. In his meeting with the CoDel, Abu Mazen had focused on his commitment to end violence, discussed efforts to reach an agreement with Hamas, and candidly described problems with Palestinian security forces and the "chaotic situation" currently faced by the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinians had also spoken in U.S. and Israeli terms about the rule of law, democracy, and transparency, he said.

15. (C) Shalom agreed that the situation has improved following Arafat's death, but he expressed concern that the Palestinians will "use the same old excuses" to avoid real action. He feared that after the elections they could again claim that the PA is too weak to confront extremists and that the Israeli military presence precludes PA action. Shalom insisted that the PA end its tolerance of "alternate military

structures" in its area of responsibility.

Aqaba Conference to Jump Start Peace Process

16. (C) Senator Lieberman asked the Foreign Minister about his recent proposal for another Aqaba conference. Shalom suggested that Abu Mazen, PM Sharon, King Abdullah, President Bush, and possibly President Mubarak meet "to give a jump start to the peace process." He stressed that the gathering would have to wait until the Palestinians ended terrorist attacks. It would build confidence, but "shouldn't deal with substance." The substantive way forward is already laid out in the road map, he said.

Shalom Doctrine: Assist Moderates and Isolate Extremists

17. (C) Shalom said that the way to deal with both the Palestinians and the Arab world is to "embrace the moderates and isolate the extremists." He noted that moderates still fear Al-Qaeda, but they face a new international environment now that Arafat is dead, Saddam is in jail, and Qadhafi has changed policies. Other countries realize that terrorism is not only an Israeli problem, which means Israel can finally be seen as being "on the side of the good guys." Senator Dayton asked how the USG could encourage moderates in the Palestinian leadership. Shalom replied that there are already positive signs, such as the recent letter by Palestinian intellectuals urging Abu Mazen to negotiate with Israel.

18. (C) Shalom noted that Syria and Iran are supporting terrorism and should be isolated. In response to a question from Senator Lieberman, Shalom said that European efforts to address the threat of Iran's nuclear program are "much better than before." Israel is dissatisfied with the last agreement signed by the EU-3 and Iran, he added, but aggressive public diplomacy efforts have led to a greater appreciation of the threat by the Europeans.

19. (U) Prior to departing to meet with PM Sharon, Shalom invited the senators to attend a special session of the UNGA on January 24 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps.

110. (U) The CoDel did not clear this message prior to departing post.

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KURTZER